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ABSTRACT

This guide, one of a series designed to aid the social studies teacher, discusses the importance of a class study, offers suggestions for collecting information, a convenient form for recording the data, and suggestions for its analysis and use. The class study plan is presented in two parts: a study and composite picture of individuals of the class, and a study of the class as a group. The information provides analysis of the class as individuals for diagnostic purposes, as well as an understanding of the dynamics of the group's interaction. The composite picture includes general data on each individual, his academic competence, personal perceptions, and extra-school factors. The class as a group is examined for its structure, satisfaction of needs, group perceptions and behavior, and general class atmosphere. Utilization of the class study includes spotting future problems, meeting existing problems, pupil teacher planning, and evaluating the class and the teacher. A copy of the form is included. Related documents are SO 005 979 through SO 006 000. (KSM)

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How To Study a Class

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"Know Your Class"

To provide the best conditions for learning, the teacher needs to have certain pertinent information about his pupils. It is necessary for him to be aware of their needs, capacities, understandings, and basic-learning skills. He should know their perceptions of the world about them, (especially attitudes, beliefs and interests) and extra-school factors affecting them. Further, he should grasp the dynamic individual and group interrelationships existing and evolving within the class.

These principles, especially those pertaining to knowing the individual, have become almost axiomatic for the teacher; however, the practical teaching situation presents him with genuine difficulties. He realizes that knowing his pupils and classes involves more than use of cumulative records and a building of general day-to-day impressions. He sees that a systematic study is required; yet he has to consider his full teaching load and additional school and professional duties. His classes are large, and a class study may seem desirable but impossible in terms of time and energy.

The task is not impossible. By following an organized approach and utilizing available information, the teacher can know his classes well enough to provide the fullest opportunities for learning—and still perform his other duties.

The class study, properly used, is the instrument which provides the teacher with the help he needs in achieving this goal. It offers suggestions for collecting information, a convenient form for recording the data and suggestions for its analysis and use. The form illustrated in this article has been used in a number of public schools. Teachers have initially feared the expenditure of time involved in filling out the form, but have learned that immediate availability of information makes the enterprise profitable. They have commented that the study provides a reference point as to "where the class is" and "where it is going."

The class study combines two types of analysis that have been used by teachers. In one, the teacher collects and records data about the student which provides a genuine though limited basis for determining the status of individuals and classes. In the other, the teacher centers his interest on the dynamics of the group's interaction. He determines with sociometric devices and trained observation the group situation in which he and the individual class members operate. Unfortunately, in focusing attention upon the whole group and the individuals as group members, the tendency has been to neglect the individuals as individuals.

The combined study allows the teacher to view his classes from two vantage points. First, he looks at the individuals and is able to determine for diagnostic purposes the aggregate picture of potentialities and limitations. He then looks at the class as a group, which enables him to grasp to some degree the relationships through which these potentialities and limitations are realized.

For the sake of clarity, the class study plan is presented in two parts: A Study and Composite Picture of the Individuals of the Class, and, A Study of the Class as a Group. Though discussed separately, the two parts are not divided in use. (See forms on pages 7 and 8.)

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A Composite Picture

A study of a class through its individual members and the organization of a composite picture based on it entails the collection of four types of information. They are: general data including the intelligence quotient, chronological age, social maturity level, and health status; data related to academic competence; data concerned with personal perceptions; and data about factors outside the school which influence students.

Much of these data will come from the cumulative records. Standardized tests and teacher-made instruments should also be utilized, but their use will depend partly on the condition of the cumulative records. If records are poorly kept and not readily accessible, additional time and energy will be necessary. However, these inadequacies, demonstrating as they do the teacher's need for ready and adequate information, should inspire rather than discourage the use of a class study. It should be recognized that while the tools suggested above are helpful, continued observation of individual behavior is of utmost importance in making a class study. After the data have been charted, they should be summarized to form a composite picture of the class based upon central tendencies and deviations.

General Data

Intelligence quotients, chronological ages, and indications of health status are usually readily available in the cumulative record, but the equally important measures of social and physical maturity levels will not be on hand in most cases.

The IQ, especially when more than one test score is available, can be used in conjunction with other data to indicate individual and class limits. Most teachers realize the danger of excessive reliance on the IQ.

Chronological age can shed only very limited light on the physical and social maturity level of the class. If the teacher wishes more detailed information he can use a test such as the *Vineland Social Maturity Scale*,[1] or if he prefers a simpler group test to this thorough individual test he may want to use the *SRA Youth Inventory*[2] for children 12 years and older. Some standardized measures of physical maturity are available, but most teachers must rely on approximations by observation. Deviations in health status should be noted, especially if they are great enough to indicate limitation of performances or activity. These limitations may have an important relationship to individual behavior within the class. For example, a youngster with a history of rheumatic fever would be placed at a great disadvantage if he were expected to keep up with the rest of the class on a field trip unless the teacher took his condition into consideration in making plans.

Academic Competence

The composite picture of the minimal academic competence of the class includes the knowledge of central tendencies and extent of deviations in reading level, language skill, general social studies achievement, work-study skills and problem-solving ability. Some teachers want to know the standing of individuals both on standardized norms and within the class.

Generally, data on reading and language skills are available in the cumulative records. If they are missing or out of date there are many good measures of reading skills available, among them, the *Metropolitan Reading Achievement Tests*[3] on the elementary and junior high school levels and the *Cooperative Reading Comprehension Tests*[4] for high school. State and citywide tests are often excellent for the various school levels. For testing language skills the *Basic Language Skills: Iowa Every-Pupil Tests of Basic Skills*,[5] the *California Achievement Tests*,[6] and the *Cooperative English Tests*[7] are considered good. They cover elementary and high school levels respectively.

Involved in measuring overall power and achievement in the social studies is the measurement of ability to obtain, organize, and interpret facts as well as the ability to apply generalizations. Outstanding social studies tests indicating overall social studies ability are to be found in the batteries included in the *Iowa Tests of Educational Development*[8] and *Sequential Tests of Educational Progress*[9] in addition to batteries already mentioned.

Scores indicating special phases of achievement may also be recorded in the class study, and some teachers

[1] *Vineland Social Maturity Scale*. Birth to Maturity. Edgar A. Doll. Minneapolis: Education Test Bureau, Educational Publishers, Inc., 1947.
[2] *SRA Youth Inventory*, H. H. Remmers, A. J. Drucker, and Benjamin Shimberg. Chicago: Science Research Associates, 1956.

[3] *Metropolitan Achievement Tests* (Reading). Intermediate and Advanced Levels. (The tests also include a study skills test with sub-scores for Language Study Skills and Social Studies Skills.) Harold H. Bixler, Walter N. Durost, Gertrude H. Hildreth, Kenneth W. Lund, and J. Wayne Wrightstone, Yonkers-on-Hudson: World Book Co.
[4] *Cooperative English Tests*, Reading Comprehension. Lower Level, Forms 2A, 2B, or 2C. Grades 9-12. Paul B. Diederich, James Hodges, William A. Jenkins, Mrs. Ann Jungeblut-Macklinthomas. Princeton, N. J.: Cooperative Test Division of Educational Testing Service.
[5] *Iowa Tests of Basic Skills*. Grades 3-9. E. F. Lindquist and A. N. Hieronymus. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co.
[6] *California Achievement Tests*. WXYZ Series, Elementary, Junior High, and Advanced Batteries. Ernest W. Tiegs and Willis W. Clark. Los Angeles: California Test Bureau.
[7] *Cooperative English Tests*, English Expression, Lower Level, Forms 2A, 2B, or 2C. Grades 9-12. Edward Anderson, et al. Princeton, N. J.: Cooperative Test Division of Educational Testing Service.
[8] *Iowa Tests of Educational Development* (ITED), Grades 9-12. E. F. Lindquist and Leonard S. Felt. Chicago: Science Research Associates.
[9] *Sequential Tests of Educational Progress*. Level 2, Grades 7-9, Level 2, Grades 10-12. Princeton: Cooperative Test Division, Educational Testing Service.

like to record the mark each student received in his previous social studies course. However, the limitations of the latter as reference should be recognized.

The teacher should keep in mind that there are many other tests available, some of which might fit his particular needs better than those mentioned above. The *Fifth Mental Measurements Yearbook*[10] provides a full description of all widely used standardized tests. Some teachers may even prefer to prepare their own tests. Many schools find it profitable to use all tests from one battery.

Personal Perceptions

Often unit pretests uncover unexpected belief patterns of pupils individually and of the class as a whole. Teachers, however, need more than fragmentary or casual knowledge of the beliefs, interests, and educational-vocational goals of their classes. Indeed, it is difficult to see how the social studies teacher can know his students and classes and their social studies needs without a systematically developed picture of their personal perceptions. Teacher-made tests, standardized tests, cumulative record information, and supplementary questionnaires will provide basic information. *The Peltier-Durost Civics and Citizenship Test*[11] is among the few attitudes and beliefs measures available in this area.

The Kuder Preference Record—Vocational Form C[12] is the most widely used vocational interest test at the junior and senior high school levels. As in the case of the attitudes and beliefs tests, the teacher will find that the chart will not fully indicate the nature of the information unless he develops a key for his own use.

The Kuder Preference Record—Personal Form A[13] brings focus upon the types of social relationships a student prefers, *e.g.*, measures a student's preference for participation in group activities, working with ideas, or directing and influencing others. The information gained from this inventory can be very helpful when used in conjunction either with the vocational inventory or when given by itself.

The Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal[14] is designed to measure a student's ability to think critically, *e.g.*, to draw sound inferences from a statement of facts, to recognize assumptions implied by a statement, and to reason logically by deduction. This instrument could be the basis for a greater understanding of the student's thought processes while also establishing an excellent setting for class discussions.

Many teachers may prefer to rely on simple questionnaires for data on interests and educational-vocational goals, and use other instruments later when more precise information is needed.

Primarily, the composite class picture of personal perceptions should answer certain questions. What portions of the class tend to be prejudiced, tolerant, liberal, conservative? What types and levels of prejudice are present? What are the dominant interests? What part of the class is college minded, what part vocational minded? What deviations are present? As will be seen in the last section, answers to these questions will be particularly valuable in teacher planning or preparing for pupil-teacher planning.

Extra-School Factors

Since perceptions and academic competencies are strongly influenced by family and community experience, the teacher should have a knowledge of the socio-economic background of his pupils. Parents' occupations, student work experiences, and minority group membership may offer key information.

Central tendencies and deviations in this area will be important in the composite picture of the individuals. From the types of occupations, some ideas related to family socio-economic status may be inferred. On the other hand, work experience of students may counteract these influences as well as confirm them. The membership of portions of the class in minority groups may have deep-seated effects on individual and class behavior and outlooks that can be understood only in terms of this membership.

Use of Individual Data

The teacher is cautioned not to overburden himself in initial enthusiasm for a class study. It is basically a diagnostic screening device. As the teacher becomes convinced of the value of collecting the data, he can broaden the scope of the information obtained. A person who is not familiar with the devices mentioned for studying the individual should start with a minimum collection of information. Thus when individual problems develop he can determine their most obvious causes by a glance at his chart. Some teachers—presumably those who place great emphasis on data related to academic competence or to the change in personal perceptions—use the chart to note the amount of growth in individuals from time to time.

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[10] *The Sixth Mental Measurements Yearbook*. Oscar K. Buros, editor. Highland Park, N. J.: The Gryphon Press, 1965.
[11] *The Peltier-Durost Civics and Citizenship Test*. Charles L. Peltier, and Walter N. Durost. Yonkers-on-Hudson: World Book Company, 1958.
[12] *Kuder Preference Record—Vocational Form C*. Grades 9-12, adults. G. Frederic Kuder. Chicago: Science Research Associates.
[13] *Kuder Preference Record—Personal Form A*. Grades 9-12, adults. G. Frederic Kuder. Chicago: Science Research Associates.
[14] *Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal*. Grades 9-12, College, Adult. Goodwin Watson and Edward M. Glaser. New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, Inc.

The class study has many advantages, and it may take a certain amount of experience with it on the part of the teacher before he is able to utilize all of them within a single semester.

The Class as a Group

To understand a class, the teacher must know how individuals react and influence group situations and how group situations influence individuals. Recent research indicates that group interaction exerts a major influence on children, that individuals in a group act chiefly as group members. Great changes take place in behavior and attitudes independently of individual preference because the social-emotional need of being accepted is strong. Individuals striving for behavior that will make them accepted often turn to conformity.

The study of the dynamics of class interaction helps the teacher identify characteristics of groups, roles played within them, and reasons for group reaction. Many times reactions are completely contrary to what one might expect from a study of the individuals comprising the group. When he understands the dynamics of his class, the teacher can work in harmony with groups, and help them in their operation; he can utilize group dynamics to facilitate learning and to meet individual needs.

The second part of the class study, concerned with the class as a group, analyzes factors of structure, the group's part in satisfying individuals' needs, ways in which the class reacts, and general class atmosphere.

Structure of the Group

First, the teacher should be aware that there are natural groups within his class. Sometimes they are clear-cut. At other times when there is constant jockeying for position as individuals try to find where they belong, the make-up of the group changes rapidly.

It is important to analyze the reasons for certain group formations. What do the individuals have in common in each group, and what is the group's general nature? Is it made up, for example, of "activity hounds," the isolates from other groups, the "good-time Charlies," or the athletes?

In addition, it is helpful to know to whom the members look for leadership and acceptance because it is they who frequently set the trend of group reaction even if it does not represent a true consensus. These individuals may be "class stars," students who most often become the nominal leaders; or they may be "non-stars," ones who strongly influence the class because of some desirable (or undesirable) quality or ability.

The isolates should be identified. They are pupils who are not necessarily disliked or excluded, but fail to be chosen or sought in group activity. Their needs are not being met, and they can develop into serious problems. In some cases the teacher may want to find the rejects (students who are actively excluded and avoided by the other pupils) as well as the isolates.

Several sociometric devices have been developed for determining who the members of the various groups are and their degrees of acceptance. Moreno and Jennings developed forms of the sociogram for the selection of the best liked students and the rejects. Most of the recent writers, however, suggest eliminating the selection of rejects. The *Bonney-Fessenden Sociograph*[15] is a chart upon which sociometric data may be recorded. Some teachers develop their own sociometric devices for specific information.

Since group structures may change frequently both in membership and participation, it is advisable to analyze them several times during the year.

Satisfaction of Needs

The group provides an opportunity for satisfying individual needs, especially those of social acceptance, status, accomplishment, and wholesome boy-girl relationships.

Measurement of the satisfaction of these needs are approximations only and can be obtained in two ways. The first is through observation of class behavior. Do the groups provide adequate social and work experiences for satisfying these needs? If they do not, the individuals may seek substitute means of satisfaction. The second is through a comparison of the stated interests of the individuals and the activities of the group. It is possible that only the needs of the influential members are being met.

Group Perceptions and Behavior

It is in the area of attitudes, beliefs, and interests that the group may vary most widely from the reactions of its individual members. The teacher can easily spot group attitudes by observing its actions and decisions. It is not uncommon for a group made up predominantly of liberal members to take conservative stands. Likewise, individuals display excellent problem-solving ability on a standardized test and in their solutions of individual problems; yet, when they work together, they may abandon critical thinking for emotional and careless procedure.

By observation, the teacher can identify these class

[15] *Bonney-Fessenden Sociograph.* Merl E. Bonney, and Seth A. Fessenden. Los Angeles: California Test Bureau, 1959.

beliefs, attitudes, and problem-solving abilities. He can use general class discussions, committee projects, or specially designed, limited problems to observe their operation. He might have the groups answer various attitude and belief inventories and compare the results with individual scores recorded in the first portion of the class study.

General Class Atmosphere

Over and beyond the identification of class structure, extent of satisfaction of needs, and the nature of group perception and behavior, the teacher needs to see the class situation as a whole. This is sometimes described as the "climate," the "tone," or the "general atmosphere" of the class.

The teacher can look for certain indicative signs which tell him whether the individuals are happy to be in the class; whether they like or resent the teacher; whether they feel free to speak out or feel they must hold their opinions to themselves; and whether they take pride in being class members.

Certain indications tell him whether the class is democratic, authoritarian or laissez faire. The extent of pupil participation in planning both the content and procedure of the course, and the degree of responsibility which the pupils assume for class operation and success are important. The frequency with which members feel free to express minority or even radically different opinions is a meaningful indication.

Teacher observation can be checked, corrected, or expanded by the use of pupil reaction sheets on which pupils indicate their own opinions about class "atmosphere."

The Class Study in Action

Data recorded on the suggested class study form provides the teacher with a handy reference tool which will help him spot embryonic problems, meet existent problems, achieve effective pupil-teacher planning, and evaluate the class.

Spotting Embryonic Problems

The teacher can avoid many serious problems by recognizing situations which can lead to trouble. Perhaps trouble signs, such as antagonistic behavior, have not yet appeared. The teacher with the class study in hand can, in a number of ways, bring about changes that will forestall these situations. He can look for clear-cut centers of potential trouble such as that of the isolates and rejects and by a quick check of the record determine their individual problems. Perhaps the social maturity level is below that of the other members of the class. Perhaps because he is lacking in some academic skills, the student may be a poor committee member. Maybe his socio-economic level, his point of view, or his membership in a minority group tends to isolate him from the others.

Or, the teacher may find that the group situation is unsatisfactory for all members of the class, not just the isolate. Certain students may be monopolizing leadership and dominating choices.

Cases of isolation and rejection can be met in several ways. For instance, the teacher can help the student improve his academic efficiency. One of the leaders might even be enlisted to help bring the isolate or reject into the working group in which he is most likely to succeed. Future activities may include areas in which the isolate is especially interested or competent. Maybe the whole group needs restructuring, or perhaps the class needs to spend time on specific problems of tolerance. The possible answers for the many latent problems within a class are numerous. The right choice depends directly upon the precision with which the situation is understood.

In addition to the record of isolates and rejects, there are other less obvious cues. Individual data may reveal marked deviations in measures of individuals or in individual patterns of measures. Group data may indicate the development of potentially undesirable group situations.

Meeting Existing Problems

Where problems are evident, the class study is an emergency resource. The teacher analyzes the situation as in the case of embryonic problems, but does not have to seek initial cues.

Since pressing problems usually demand more direct action than incipient ones, the teacher must find the answer that is likely to meet immediate demands yet avoids creating other problems.

Pupil-Teacher Planning

Perhaps the greatest advantage of a class study is that it helps the teacher play his proper role in pupil-teacher planning. This type of planning requires that the teacher know the potential of the class and his individual pupils, their limits, and their needs and interests. Above all, he must understand the forces at work within the class. The class study provides data whereby these facts can be known.

Examples may clarify this advantage. Aware of the real reading level of certain groups, the teacher may guide them away from tasks where readings are either too advanced or too unchallenging. Or, recognizing that certain needs expressed by the members themselves are not

being met, the teacher may help direct class activities toward fulfilling them. Seeing the emergence of groups and leaders who seek to dominate class direction, the teacher may lend support to goals sought by others in the class.

Even if class and teacher are already doing a successful job of planning, the teacher with a class study is better prepared to carry out his responsibilities.

Evaluation

Finally, the class study provides an excellent reference point against which individual and class growth can be evaluated. The teacher can judge whether there has been growth in basic and social studies skills, in attitudes and beliefs, in problem-solving and critical thinking skills and attitudes, and in the level of group operation. Thus the total progress picture can be judged in a more inclusive manner.

What's more, the class study is meaningful in teacher self-evaluation. The teacher does not hold himself responsible for growth beyond the individual and particular class capabilities. On the other hand, he does not allow himself to accept a lower level of performance than his knowledge of the class and its members should lead him to expect.

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NOTE: This *How To Do It* notebook series, designed for a loose-leaf binder, provides a practical and useful source of classroom techniques for social studies teachers. Elementary and secondary teachers alike will find them helpful. The titles now available in this series are: *How To Use a Motion Picture, How To Use a Textbook, How To Use Local History, How To Use a Bulletin Board, How To Use Daily Newspapers, How To Use Group Discussion, How To Use Recordings, How To Use Oral Reports, How To Locate Useful Government Publications, How To Conduct a Field Trip, How To Utilize Community Resources, How To Handle Controversial Issues, How To Introduce Maps and Globes, How To Use Multiple Books, How To Plan for Student Teaching, How To Study a Class, How To Use Sociodrama, How To Work with the Academically Talented in the Social Studies,* and *How To Develop Time and Chronological Concepts.*

Suggested Form for a Class Study

A Study and Composite Picture of the Individuals of the Class

CLASS MEMBERS	GENERAL DATA				ACADEMIC COMPETENCE										PERSONAL PERCEPTIONS			EXTRA-SCHOOL FACTORS		
	IQ	Chron. Age	Social Maturity	Health Status	Reading Skills		Lang. Skills		Soc. Stud. Achvt.		Problem Solving		Study Skills		Beliefs, Attitudes	Interests	Educational Vocat'l. Goals	Parents' Occupations	Work Experience	Minority Gp. Members
					Beg.	Pres.	Beg.	Pres.	Beg.	Pres.	Beg.	Pres.	Beg.	Pres.						

Composite Picture

1. IQ-median ..... range .....
2. CA-median ..... range .....
3. Social Maturity (Class description, noting deviants) .....
4. Health Status (Note deviants) .....
5. Reading Skills-median ..... range .....
6. Language Skills-median ..... range .....
7. Social Studies Achievement .....
   (Noting shortcomings, etc.) median ..... range .....
8. Problem Solving .....
9. Study Skills .....
10. Beliefs, Attitudes .....
11. Interests .....
12. Educational-Vocational Goals .....
13. Parents' Occupations .....
14. Work Experience .....
15. Minority Group Experience .....

A Study of the Class as a Group

STRUCTURE OF THE GROUP

1. *Clear-cut groups*
   group membership — description of group

2. *Isolated or rejected members:*
   names — brief statement of possible reason(s) for isolation or rejection

3. *Class "stars":*
   names — brief statement of possible reason(s) for popularity

4. *Influential "non-stars":*
   names — brief statement of possible reason(s) for influence

SATISFACTION OF THE NEEDS

5. *Does the class or group provide for satisfactory accomplishment experiences?* (Note exceptions, listing student names and unmet, needed experiences.)
   a. Are individuals allowed to work at things they like or need to do?
   b. Do individuals have frequent chances for success?
   c. Is provision made for understanding failures?
   d. Do the groups use proper problem-solving approaches?
6. *Does the class and its groups provide for satisfactory social experiences?* (Note and indentify exceptions.)
   a. Do individuals and groups mix freely?
   b. Do boys and girls work together on common problems and interests?

GROUP PERCEPTIONS AND BEHAVIOR

7. *Does the class maintain high standards of performance?* Give examples as to quantity and quality of accomplishment with which it is satisfied, the nature of its immediate or long-range goals, etc.
8. *What are the dominant beliefs and attitudes?* (Note these by observation or results of beliefs tests and attitudes tests.)

GENERAL CLASS ATMOSPHERE

9. *Is the class authoritarian or democratic?* (Locate it on the continuum.)

10. *Does freedom of expression exist?* (Locate class on continuum.)

11. *Does a feeling of cohesiveness exist?* (Check "yes" or "no" columns.)

Yes	No	
.....	.....	Do pupils exhibit pride in the class and seem at home in class situation?
.....	.....	Do small groups gather informally after class?
.....	.....	Do pupils plan out-of-class functions for the whole class?
.....	.....	Do pupils speak favorably about the class to outsiders?
.....	.....	Do pupils make efforts to improve the situation when the class does not seem to be progressing very well?